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of Engineers**

Jacksonville District

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS ANNOUNCES LAKE OKEECHOBEE HAS REACHED TARGET ELEVATION AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District announced today that the target elevation of 14.0 feet on Lake Okeechobee was reached this week. The Corps' goal was to reach the 14-ft. elevation by May 1.

Jacksonville District achieved this goal under a deviation to the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule, authorized by its South Atlantic Division. The deviation allowed the use of up to Level 1 pulse releases, which mimic rainfall event flows, from Lake Okeechobee. Additional contributing factors included normal water supply releases performed by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and dry weather patterns over the last four months.

"We are pleased to have reached this milestone well in advance of our goal. Based on projections for rainfall and surface evaporation, this puts us on track to be well below 14 feet by June 1," said Col. Robert M. Carpenter, commander of Jacksonville District. "This achievement is indicative of the management decisions we make every day, as we listen to the public's concerns and as we prepare for the 2006 hurricane season. Achieving the 14-ft. level now minimizes the need for subsequent larger regulatory releases later in the season, improves ecological conditions for both Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, and provides for public safety."

The Corps is currently studying and considering changes to the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule, with the intent to improve management of the lake based on data collected over the past few years. As part of its ongoing analysis, the Corps has received and listened to public concerns for the environmental health of the lake and estuaries, and is considering near term changes to address environmental needs. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) contains future projects that will contribute significantly to the goal of lowering lake levels.

“An interim change to the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule will maximize the potential for flood protection and provide better ecological balance for the ecosystem, yet will not impact navigation and water supply,” said Carpenter. “It will provide more opportunities for the kind of decision-making that allowed us to set and reach our goal of 14-ft. elevation today, and maintain lake elevations within their optimum range.”

It is expected that the current dry season will result in a continued drop in the lake’s level over the next month or two. The Corps will continue to utilize pulse releases authorized under the current deviation, as necessary, to further ensure the environmental health of the lake and the stability of the Herbert Hoover Dike as hurricane season approaches.

Further information, including water level data and flows for Lake Okeechobee and the Central and Southern Florida Project, can be found on the Jacksonville District web site, water management page, at <http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/h2o/index.htm>.

For further information, please call the Jacksonville District Corporate Communication Office at 904-232-2236 or (cell) 904-614-4976.

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